

PROCOPIUS IN HUNGARIAN

Tamás Kovács

In his paper published in 1965, Gyula Moravcsik (1892–1972), an important figure in Hungarian Byzantine studies, emphasised that most of the Hungarian research in the field in the first half of the twentieth century had dealt with issues connected to the history of the land and society of Hungary, i.e., to the history of the Carpathian Basin before the Hungarian conquest of the Basin, to questions related to Avars, Bulgarians and Khazars and also to the medieval history of Hungarians. This focus of research has not gone through modifications since then, and so in the second half of the century and subsequent years, there have been only a few researchers who focused more narrowly on Procopius. However, an indisputable advantage of papers that had been published previously is that Hungarian Byzantine research has always considered it important to acquaint the international community with its results. For this reason, numerous researchers' papers were published not only in Hungarian but in foreign languages as well, either in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* or in other international periodicals, so that authoritative Hungarian publications are available primarily both in English or German.

The 1970's generation, primarily Gyula Moravcsik's students, determined the development of Hungarian research on Procopius. One of his students, namely István Kapitánffy (1932–97), who was the leader of the Department of Greek Philology of ELTE and the head of the Institute of Medieval Studies of Pázmány Péter Catholic University,

translated Procopius' *Anecdota*.¹ In addition, he took an active part in the Hungarian popularisation of Byzantine literature by editing and writing chrestomathies, encyclopaedia articles, and literary historical handbooks.

Wars

Another Moravcsik student is Róbert Benedicty who wrote a doctoral dissertation entitled 'A forma és tartalom viszonya Prokopios etnográfiai tudósításaiban' ('The Relationship between Form and Content in Procopius' Ethnographic Reports') at the Eötvös Loránd University.² As for his dissertation, two articles were published in Hungarian: 'A milieu-elmélet a kaisareai Prokopiosnál' ('The Milieu Theory by Procopius of Caesarea')³ and 'A Thuelről szóló ethnographiai exkurzus a Kaisareiai Prokopiosnál' ('The Ethnographic Excursus on Thule by Procopius of Caesarea').⁴

In his first study, he discusses the anthropological characteristics of the northern Barbaric people (milieu theory) through Procopius' excursuses on the Scandinavians (*Wars* 7.14.21–30) and Goths (*Wars* 3.2.2–6). Benedicty, through an examination of the syntax of Procopius' sentences, shows that Procopius treats humans' mental and physical life as a whole. He indicates that the author always expresses physical and mental similarities with sentences of equal rank. The 'similarity' applied by Procopius is one of the old axioms of Ionic natural science that later became a standard view and was applied to Germanic peoples for the first time by Posidonius. Benedicty's study shows that Procopius was well acquainted with the version of the milieu theory represented by Aristotle and Posidonius, and he also shows that peripatetic philosophy had a great influence on Procopius. The reference to Peripatetics, however, shows

¹ Kapitánffy (1984).

² Benedicty (1960).

³ Benedicty (1962).

⁴ Benedicty (1963).

how Procopius knew this characteristically antique theory: according to the author's opinion, he acquired this knowledge within the frame of deep philosophical studies.

In another paper, Benedicty also deals with ethnographic questions. He analyzes Procopius' description of the Thule peninsula (*Wars* 6.15.16–26) which, by his own admission, he had never seen. (*Wars* 6.15.8) Benedicty is of the opinion that the oral reports derived from direct sources were provided by Herul commanders who had served in the Byzantine army, who, according to Procopius' report, escaped from the Gepids back to Thule. Benedicty shows that even though Procopius' reports are laden with ancient clichés and look like *topoi*, they nonetheless have historical authenticity. Procopius did not apply Herodotus' and Strabo' motifs as other ancient authors did. The reason for the 'transfer' of motifs, according to Benedicty, could be that he received similar information about the people of Thule, which he expanded with data from earlier authors, using their terminology. The fact that Procopius had a much broader geographical view than most ancient authors also played a part in the use of motifs. According to Benedicty, the veneration of Ares and the human sacrifices that can be connected to him are authentic, and the *topos* is limited just to the form that he used as a cliché. Procopius was here using a well-known and characteristic Herodotean *topos*. Hence, although Herodotus had a role in the forming of the ancient model of giving ethnographical reports, it did not influence the authenticity of this section. Thus the archaic form of Procopius' account masks an authentic core.

Tamás Mészáros, also connected to Pázmány Péter Catholic University and currently leading a classical philology workshop in ELTE Eötvös József Collegium, examined Thucydides' Byzantine reception in the framework of an OTKA project grant won in 2012.⁵ Part of the project was to evaluate 'Thucydides' Byzantine followers,'

⁵ The Hungarian National Research Fund (OTKA) project website is available at <http://nyilvanos.otka-palyazat.hu/index.php?menuid=930&lang=EN&num=104876>.

including Procopius' oeuvre, as well as mapping the relation between classical and Byzantine historiography.⁶ Mészáros has new arguments about the conscious use of Attic Greek, viewing it as a typical element in early Byzantine historiography that was required by the audience for such works. He also emphasised that, according to Byzantine authors, the whole literary heritage was a public resource that a writer could take up and modify freely. Mészáros' research has also proposed that Procopius considered Thucydides' work to be of great importance, but at the same time, he also found evidence of the influence of Herodotus and Plutarch and echoes of Arrian as well.

Four articles published in Hungarian within the framework of the OTKA project deal with Procopius' works. Two concern the *Wars*, 'Változatok egy témára: Thukydidéstől Prokopiosig' ('Variations on a Theme: From Thucydides to Procopius'),⁷ and 'Megjegyzések Prokopios perzsa történeteire' (*De bellis* I, 2–6) ('Notes on Procopius' Persian stories (*De bellis* I.2–6)'),⁸ and two the *Anecdota*: 'Megjegyzések Prokopios Titkos történetéhez' ('Notes on Procopius' Secret History'),⁹ and 'Prokopios "párhuzamos életrajzainak" irodalmi előképeihez' (2014) ('On the Literary Prefigurations of Procopius' "Parallel Biographies").¹⁰

In his 'Variations on a Theme: From Thucydides to Procopius', Mészáros examines through the literary motif of a siege description how imitation (*imitatio*) appears in practice. The core of the text is given by Thucydides' description of the siege of Plataea (*Wars* 2.2–6, 71–78; 3.20–24, 52–68), where the author artfully uses military terminol-

⁶ During his OTKA project, Mészáros analysed the following manuscripts: *Vind. hist. Gr.* 33 and *Vind. suppl.* 90 gr. 44 (Vienna), *MS* 4561 (Madrid), *Cod. Pal. Gr.* 252 (Heidelberg), *Cod. Gr.* 430 (Munich), *Suppl. Gr.* 256 and *Suppl. Gr.* 607 (Paris).

⁷ Mészáros (2013c), of which there is an earlier English version: Mészáros (2012).

⁸ Mészáros (2015), of which there is an earlier French version: Mészáros (2014b).

⁹ Mészáros (2013a) in English: Mészáros (2013b).

¹⁰ Mészáros (2014a).

ogy and occasionally enlivens this exciting episode by interspersing it with well-structured rhetorical speeches. Mészáros examines the text of siege descriptions by Dexippus, Priscus, and finally Procopius' own *locus*. He argues that in the text of the *Wars*, it is not only one siege which shows a parallel with the siege of Plataea. In the part introducing the Italian conquests (*Wars* 5.8), in the case of the siege of Naples in 536, we can already find Thucydidean allusions before the discussion part of the siege, since in the conversation between Stephanus and Belisarius, the speech of the former resembles the speech of the Plataean people to Archidamus. According to Mészáros, Procopius consciously copies Thucydides. Using identical phrases and similar expressions, however, is merely a formal tool, with no bearing on historical authenticity. Alongside the textual overlap, editorial parallelism can also be observed: both authors divided the events in accordance with annalistic structuring, both of them enliven and delay the plot by inserting rhetorical speeches, and both of them use the stylistic instrument of magnification. According to Mészáros, behind the copying of Thucydides, there is a higher principle, namely the unbroken transmission of the classical heritage that is one of the most important principles of Byzantine historiography.

In the article entitled 'Megjegyzések Prokopios perzsa történetehez (*Wars* 1.2–6)' Mészáros discusses these opening sections of the work and comes to grips with Kaldellis' views on the author's assessment of the Byzantines and Persians. In addition, he also discusses some questions concerning Procopius' chronology. According to his argument, Procopius' chronology is merely relative, and dates can only be worked out by correlating them with other sources. The first seven books of the *Wars* are structured according to scenes and in chronological order until the sixteenth year (550) of the Gothic War and most likely were published together in 550/551. On the other hand, the eighth book differs structurally and in his view was published later, either in 554 or only after 557.

Wars 1.2–6 is enlivened by episodes that could be viewed as anecdotes or even fiction, which scholars consider to be a collection that is entertaining and devoid of historical authenticity. Mészáros, however, counters this perception. In the article, he introduces and analyses the so-called ‘Persian stories’. In his view, Procopius applies Herodotus’ literary techniques in order to depict the moral destruction that led to the war. He reveals that both Herodotus and Procopius use regal parallels. While in Herodotus Cyrus is the good king and Xerxes is the autocrat, in Procopius Yazdgerd is the good king and Khusro is the autocrat. Imitation of Herodotus appears in the excursus as well, where Herodotus and Procopius introduce nations in equivalent order (territory, political system, characteristics, and habits). According to the article, Procopius introduces the natural history of the development of autocracy that derives from Herodotean precedents into the Persian anecdotes. According to the conclusion of the story, the empire can only be successful while the ruler governs in accordance with proper values. Decay starts with the change of values.

Anecdota

Mészáros, in the article entitled ‘Megjegyzések Prokopiosz Titkos történetéhez’, contributes to the debate related to the genesis of the *Anecdota*. He upholds the publication date of 550, discussing the work’s origins and the structure of Procopius’ works. In the matter of the structure, he does not accept the traditional triple division of the *Anecdota* (*Arc.* 1–5, 6–7, 18–30) because he thinks that it can be divided into two parts (*Arc.* 1–17, 18–30).

Concerning the date of composition of Procopius’ works, he argues for the following order: he thinks that *Wars* I–VII were published in 550/551, *Wars* VIII in 554 and the *Buildings* was his last work. In the case of this last text, in the determination of the two possible (554/556) publication dates, it has to be taken into account that the *Buildings*, when mentioning the geography of the Mediterranean Sea

(*Aed.* 6.1.8) refers to *Wars* VIII and at the same time mentions the building of the 430m long bridge over the Sangarius river (*Aed.* 5.3.8–11), which is described as finished by Paul the Silentiary (*Descriptio Sanctae Sophiae* 930–3) and by Agathias Scholasticus (*Anth. Gr.* 9.641) in 562. According to Mészáros a composition date of 556 cannot work because the building of the bridge would have been hit by the earthquake in Constantinople in 557 and by the Kutrigur invasion in 559. Taking these events into consideration, he argues that it is quite impossible that such a long bridge was finished within three years (559–62), and consequently 554 remains the only possible date for the composition of the *Buildings*.

The precise determination of the relative chronology of his works is straightforward in the case of the *Anecdota*, which does not report any events after 550, but the first part of the *Anecdota* (1–17), in the case of numerous persons (Antonina, Belisarius, John the Cappadocian), refers to his previous work which in this case could only be *Wars* I–VII; moreover, Procopius himself states that he is writing in Justinian's thirty-second year, so that Justinian's reign should not be calculated from 527 but from 518, a method that Procopius himself *expressis verbis* approves (*Arc.* 6.19). Therefore, the *Anecdota* could only have been written after *Wars* VII. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that among the numerous natural disasters a damaged passage appears about the flooding of the Scirtus river (*Arc.* 18.38), which Dindorf and Haury corrected in different ways. Dindorf thought that *Arc.* was the last work of Procopius, and so he changed the form of the temporal adverb, while Haury decided the opposite on the basis of a different assessment of the order of the works. Yet neither *Wars* I–VII nor *Wars* VIII describe the flood, and so the possible *locus* referred to might be *Aed.* 2.7.2–16. Thus, if Dindorf's correction is right, *Aed.* was written before *Arc.*, while the opposite is true in the case of Haury.

Mészáros argues for the two-fold division of the text because he thinks that Procopius wrote only the second part (18–30) in 550, since only here can entries be found which

refer to Justinian's thirty-second regnal year (18.33, 23.1, 24.29, 24.33). His case is strengthened by the disunity of the *Anecdota* as well since—in the traditional triple division—in the first part (1–5) thirty different names appear, a remarkably high figure, while in the second part (6–17) the *ultima manus* is obviously missing, and the third part (18–30) displays unity and coherence. So instead of the traditional triple division of the *Anecdota* (1–5, 6–17, 18–30) he proposes that the text should be divided into two parts (1–17, 18–30). The division into two parts is suggested by the similarity between the opening sentence of this work and *Wars* VIII; the procedure described here is adopted, however, not in *Anecdota* but in *Wars* VIII. For this reason Mészáros supposes that the *prooemium* of *Wars* viii was attached to an unfinished work (*Anecdota* 1–17), a work that comprised anecdotes and comments on the events of *Wars* I–VII which was prepared in parallel with that work, so that its basis was formed by elements that necessarily had to be omitted from an openly published work. The second part (18–30), however, is a well-edited political pamphlet that could have been written in 550, but could not have been published in Procopius' lifetime. The fact that *Suda* refers to this work with the title 'unpublished edition' would appear to confirm this.

In the paper entitled 'Prokopios "párhuzamos életrajzainak" irodalmi előképeihez', Mészáros continues the analysis that he started in the previous article. According to Procopius himself (*Arc.* 1.4), the genre of the first part is a biography. Mészáros analyses the generic features of the first part of the work. While some formal elements of political-ethical biography (origin, youth, internal and external characterisation, important deeds) do appear in the text of the *Anecdota*, any intention to teach by moral example is completely missing. Mészáros therefore takes biographies that appeared in classical historical works into consideration as well, whose exclusive aim is to show the truth, sometimes with a strongly aggressive style similar to diatribe. Procopius' aim was obviously that of any conscientious writer, the desire to record the truth. He

considers the questionable acts of the imperial couple and the biography of Belisarius and his wife, which is no less instructive, as parallel biographies and shows that a parallelism can be observed on several levels (couples, two men, two women). Within the framework of generic features, he calls attention to the fact that didactic debate (narrative biography) does not aim to provide information but to make the reader also improve in a moral sense through the recognition of the person's biography and also to make him act like his 'heroes'. According to Mészáros, in the *Anecdota* the majority of the formal elements in Plutarch (origin, inner and external qualities, characteristic acts, stories enlivening the narrative) can be found, but the essence is missing, since while Plutarch provides models for his audience, Procopius does not provide actors that could be models for his audience.

In conclusion, it can be stated that in Hungary currently, one researcher is examining thoroughly Procopius' oeuvre, namely Mészáros Tamás. His Hungarian translation of Procopius' oeuvre is in progress.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Benedicty, R. (1960) *A forma és tartalom viszonya Prokopios etnográfiai tudósításaiban* (Budapest).
- (1962) ‘A milieu-elmélet a kaisareai Prokopiosnál’, *Antik Tanulmányok: Studia Antiqua* 1: 31–8.
- (1963) ‘A Thuekról szóló ethnographiai exkurzus a Kaisareiai Prokopiosnál’, *Antik Tanulmányok: Studia Antiqua* 1: 59–65.
- Kapitánffy, I. (1984) *Prokopios Titkos Történet* (Budapest).
- Mészáros, T. (2015) ‘Megjegyzések Prokopios “perzsa történeteire” (*De bellis* I, 2–6)’, *Antik Tanulmányok: Studia Antiqua* 1: 21–36.
- (2012) ‘Variations On A Theme : From Thucydides to Procopius’, *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 225–34.
- (2013a) ‘Megjegyzések Prokopios Titkos történetéhez’, *Antik Tanulmányok: Studia Antiqua* 2: 223–39.
- (2013b) ‘Notes on Procopius’ Secret History’, in E. Juhász, Z. Farkas and L. Horváth, edd., *Byzanz und das Abendland: Begegnungen zwischen Ost und West* (Budapest) 285–304.
- (2013c) ‘Változatok egy témára: Thukydidéstől Prokopiosig’, in G. Fodor and G. Sarbak, edd., *Ünnepi kötet Maróth Miklós hetvenedik születésnapja tiszteletére* (Budapest) 107–16.
- (2014a) ‘Prokopios “párhuzamos életrajzainak” irodalmi előképeihez’, *Aetas* 1: 112–21.
- (2014b) ‘Remarques sur les “histoires perses” de Procope (*De bellis* I, 2–6)’, in E. Juhász, ed., *Byzanz und das Abendland II: Studia Byzantino-Occidentalia* 161–77.